

IN THE NEWS

Israeli, Palestinian die in new violence

One Israeli and one Palestinian were killed in separate incidents Tuesday.

An Israeli father of five was killed and three Israelis were injured in a Palestinian shooting attack on a car near the West Bank city of Ramallah.

In the Gaza Strip, Israeli soldiers killed a Palestinian gunman.

South African businessman nabbed

A Jewish businessman was arrested in Denver after attempting to ship high-tech tools to Pakistan.

Asher Karni, 50, who has both Israeli and South African citizenship, was arrested Jan. 2 at Denver International Airport for exporting spark gaps, which send electronic pulses, to Pakistan. The devices can be used to destroy kidney stones — or to detonate nuclear weapons.

A U.S. Magistrate Court ruled Tuesday that Karni should be released on \$75,000 bond, but that ruling has been set aside until Thursday, when prosecutors will choose whether to appeal.

A license is needed to sell spark gaps because of their dual use, and the government alleges Karni falsified documents in exporting them from New Jersey to Cape Town.

Chirac meets Israeli journalists

France is doing its best to fight anti-Semitism, and Israeli journalists should treat France fairly, President Jacques Chirac said.

The comments came during a meeting Tuesday between Chirac and Israeli journalists in Paris. France recently has taken steps to combat anti-Semitism, which has risen since the Palestinian intifada started three years ago.

Because of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the JTA World Report will not publish Monday, Jan. 19.

WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE · WWW.JTA.ORG

Activist rabbi in the dock hopes Israeli policy will be on trial

By JOE BERKOFSKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — As the Israeli bulldozer rumbled toward him, Rabbi Arik Ascherman says, he thought of Rachel Corrie.

Ascherman, 44, a U.S.-born Reform rabbi who now lives in Jerusalem, was trying last April to block the demolition of the Maswadeh family's home in Beit Hanina, an Arab village on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The house violated municipal zoning regulations.

Corrie, 23, an American activist with the pro-Palestinian International Solidarity Movement, had been crushed to death a month earlier by an Israeli bulldozer demolishing a Gaza Strip home that allegedly concealed the exit of an arms-smuggling tunnel.

"I don't think we'll ever know whether she fell, whether the bulldozer saw her or whether it was a game of chicken that went too far," Ascherman says. "If it was an accident, it drives home that when you're in front of a bulldozer knocking down a home, accidents can happen."

Ascherman was luckier. He lost only his skullcap in the rubble of the Maswadeh home.

On Wednesday, Ascherman, the executive director of Rabbis for Human Rights Israel, is due to appear in court to face charges of interfering with a police action in Beit Hanina and in the village of Issawiyah, north of Jerusalem. If convicted, he could face three years in jail and fines.

But his advocacy group is hoping that it will be Israel's policy of demolishing illegally built Arab homes that really will be on trial.

On Tuesday, Rabbis for Human Rights North America delivered a statement by 300 rabbis spanning the denominational spectrum to Washington's Israeli Embassy and New York's Israeli Consulate demanding that the charges against Ascherman be dropped and urging Israel to stop demolishing Arab homes.

Ascherman is "totally devoted to the moral heritage of the Jewish people, and that is precisely why the Israeli government is prosecuting him," said Rabbi Brian Walt, executive director of the group's North American chapter.

Israel's consul for media and public affairs in New York, Ido Aharoni, promised that the protest letter would be relayed to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office.

But Aharoni backed the demolition policy and the charges against Ascherman. Authorities tear down illegal buildings, whether they're in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv or anywhere else, he said.

For years, Arabs built homes illegally while Israeli authorities were reluctant to enter Palestinian areas due to "security threats," he said. "Now the government is determined to put an end to it. The motivation is legal, not political."

Ascherman "was trying to do something illegal," he added, "and if he were doing the same thing in New York, I guarantee you that the New York City Police Department would arrest him."

Ascherman and other members of his group expect the trial to take months. The rabbis want to turn the spotlight on Israel's demolition policy, which they say violates

Continued on page 2

**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

■ Rabbi hopes to use his trial to put the spotlight on Israel's home demolitions

Continued from page 1

both Palestinian human rights and Jewish and Zionist ideals.

"These prosecutions will never lead to the kind of Israel we want and desire: a Jewish State that celebrates the prophetic voice which has animated our people for centuries," the letter said. "True democracies protect minority rights, and cherish and listen to their critics, to those who stand with the poor and powerless."

The Maswadeh family, whose home has been razed and rebuilt four times and turned into a peace center, stands as a "symbol" of the struggle against house demolitions, Ascherman says.

While Ascherman's reference to Corrie carries heavy symbolism, the two cases are also different. The rabbinical group combats only zoning-related demolitions, even though it also officially opposes the kind of security demolitions Corrie was fighting — where the army razes homes used to hide weapons or that belong to terrorists or their families.

The group also helps Palestinians harvest olives from their trees.

Walt said Israel discriminates by destroying Palestinian homes built without permits while encouraging construction in Jewish neighborhoods in the West Bank near Jerusalem, like Har Homa, Ma'aleh Adumim and Pisgat Ze'ev.

Critics say that since the 1967 Six-Day War, Jerusalem officials have tried to keep the city's Arab sector at about 28 percent

of the population, moving Jews into eastern Jerusalem and limiting building permits for Palestinians.

The rabbinical group cites statistics by the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, which says 2,500 homes have been demolished in eastern Jerusalem and the West Bank since 1987, leaving 16,000 Palestinians homeless.

Others say illegal Palestinian construction continues unabated and Jerusalem's population is shifting in the Arabs' favor.

Justus Reid Weiner, a scholar with the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, wrote in a recent report that illegal Palestinian construction "has reached epidemic proportions."

The city has issued 36,000 new housing permits to Arabs, but they also have built 6,000 new homes without permits in the last four years, Weiner says.

Moreover, more illegal Jewish homes than Arab ones were razed from 1999 to 2001, according to Weiner's report.

Arabs constitute an ever-larger percentage of Jerusalem's population. In 1967, when Israel conquered the city's eastern half, the ratio of Jews to Arabs in the capital was 73 percent to 27 percent.

That shifted to 68 percent Jewish to 32 percent Arab by 2000, Weiner writes, and

is projected to shift to 62 percent Jewish and 38 percent Arab by 2020.

Ascherman and Walt say Palestinians must either bribe city officials to secure building permits or become informants, forcing many into a "Catch-22" of building illegally and risking retribution.

Rabbis for Human Rights' home-demolition protest comes at a time when few major American Jewish groups have taken a stand on such issues. Many groups contacted by JTA said they

have no policy on the demolitions.

"Israel is a democracy. We don't look over their shoulder, we don't monitor the Israeli government," said Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, executive vice president of the Orthodox Union.

But Rabbis for Human Rights says its rabbis, including top officials of the liberal movements and a handful of Orthodox clergy, represent "mainstream" American Jewry.

Ascherman says he hopes the group's protest will have an effect somewhere down the line.

"I am hoping that someday Palestinians will dig up the kippah," — the yarmulke Ascherman lost while protesting the demolition — "and see that Jews in the name of the Torah tried to fight this policy," he said.

Few major American Jewish groups have taken a stand on Arab home demolitions.

U.S. agencies: Liberty attack a mistake

WASHINGTON (JTA) — An examination of recently declassified U.S. intelligence documents reinforces Israel's claims that its 1967 attack on a U.S. ship was a mistake.

National Security Agency historian David Hatch said intercepts of a conversation between Israel's Air Force command and two helicopter pilots "suggest strongly that the Israeli attackers did not know they were aiming deadly fire at a vessel belonging to the United States," though they fall short of absolute proof.

State Department historian Harriet Schwar examined inquiries by the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency and presidential adviser Clark Clifford after the war.

These all "concluded the attack was not made in malice," Schwar said.

Schwar and Hatch spoke Monday at a State Department conference on the Six-Day War.

The attack on the USS Liberty, at the height of the 1967 Six-Day War, killed 34 U.S. sailors. Israeli planes and torpedo boats attacked it off the coast of the Sinai Peninsula on June 8, 1967.

Israel and the United States have conducted numerous investigations over the years, all determining that the attack was accidental.

But some independent reviews, including a History Channel documentary, have suggested that the attack by Israel was deliberate.

JTA WORLD REPORT

Howard E. Friedman
President

Mark J. Joffe
Executive Editor and Publisher

Lisa Hostein
Editor

Michael S. Arnold
Managing Editor

Lenore A. Silverstein
Finance and Administration Director

Paula Simmonds
Marketing and Development Director

JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
© JTA. Reproduction only with permission.

In Bush immigration plan, devil in the details

By E.B. SOLOMONT

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jewish groups are pleased with President Bush's initiative to give illegal immigrants temporary legal status in the United States — but they are withholding their full endorsement until they see how Congress fills in the details.

"The most important thing is that the president recognized and stated publicly that immigrants are a tremendous value to the United States and that our immigration system needs to be fixed," said Gideon Aronoff, vice president of government relations and public policy for the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

Since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Bush has been focused on the war on terrorism, paying little attention to the issue of immigration.

However, his new immigration initiative, announced Jan. 7, has "put the issue front and center, back at the top of the agenda," Aronoff said, "and that is a very good thing."

The initiative would offer temporary legal status to illegal immigrants who want to enter the U.S. workforce. They could fill jobs for which no American employee can be found for up to three years, after which their permits could be renewed.

Immigrants who currently work illegally could qualify for the temporary-worker status after paying a one-time fee that has yet to be decided.

Critics say the initiative fails to provide a long-term solution to the problem of illegal immigration.

Immigrant advocates point to the dangers illegal immigrants face on the nation's southern border, where most enter the country, and of exploitative American employers.

Since Sept. 11, undocumented workers in the United States have been called a potential threat to homeland security.

Bush's plan is only a "quick fix," said Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding. The foundation works to strengthen ties between Jews and blacks and Jews and Latinos.

The program doesn't provide meaningful access to permanent visas or a path to citizenship, Schneier said.

In addition, while Bush has praised undocumented immigrants' economic contributions to the country, the initiative ultimately will relegate temporary workers to second-class employee status, Schneier said.

"The Latino leaders I have talked with are disappointed with the initiative," Schneier said. "As part of intergroup relations, it behooves the Jewish community to take its lead from Latino leadership."

The president's plan is targeted primarily at Latinos, though Jews, too, have a stake in comprehensive immigration reform.

Of the estimated 8 million to 10 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, a few are Israeli, Russian and Latino Jewish immigrants.

"In the Russian Jewish community, no more than 7 percent is illegal," said Alec Brook-Krasny, executive director of the Council of Jewish Emigre Community Organizations, an umbrella group for 25 Russian Jewish organizations in New York. Bush's initiative would affect no more than 10,000 Russian-speaking Jews in New York, he said.

There is no comprehensive estimate of illegal Israeli immigrants in America, according to Ido Aharoni, consul for media and public affairs at Israel's consulate in New York.

"I can only assume some will be affected," he said, if they have overstayed tourist visas or are working illegally.

Still, the Jewish community traditionally has felt a sense of responsibility on immigration issues for historical, humanitarian and political reasons.

As recently as this summer, HIAS and several other Jewish organizations lobbied the U.S. government for comprehensive immigration reform.

An immigration resolution will be on the agenda at next month's annual meeting of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, said Reva Price, JCPA's Washington representative.

The resolution, which is still being

drafted, will reaffirm the group's commitment to open immigration policies. It also will address the backlog in family immigration, among other issues.

Part of the problem with Bush's plan may be its lack of detail.

While groups like HIAS, JCPA and the American Jewish Committee — longstanding supporters of generous immigration policies — support Bush's idea, they're withholding final judgment until the specifics of the plan Bush announced in his speech are determined in Congress.

Bush's speech set forth the broad outlines of the immigration plan, leaving most of the details — such as how to apply, who may qualify and what might disqualify someone from the new program — for Congress to decide.

Bush "brought up critical issues favoring migrants and those coming over the border," Price said.

But, she added, "the devil is in the details, and we will have to wait and see what the proposal looks like."

Richard Foltin, legislative director and counsel at the AJCommittee, called the plan a "step in the right direction."

He cautioned, however, that the plan may not set forth a path under which immigrants who have lived in the United States for a set period of time could become citizens.

HIAS' Aronoff said Bush's plan also doesn't resolve concerns about backlogs in family immigration, one of the group's main concerns.

The groups were careful not to criticize the president's proposal too harshly, however.

"I think the choice for the Jewish community and the country is stark: Either we bury our heads in the sand and pretend there is no problem and do nothing, or we come up with a sensible, long-term approach that helps on humanitarian and security needs," Aronoff said.

"The national conversation on immigration reform got a shot in the arm from President Bush — and what the final conclusion will be has yet to be written." ■

Of the estimated 8 million to 10 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, some are Israeli, Russian and Latino Jews.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Sharon expose

A former aide to Ariel Sharon said Sharon knew about illicit funding of his political campaigns.

On Monday, David Spector, a strategy consultant who helped Sharon win the 1999 Likud Party primary, told Israel's Channel Two television that the prime minister was involved in all aspects of the campaign financing — including an allegedly illegal \$1.5 million loan from a South African friend.

Spector played a recording of what he said was a conversation between himself and Sharon in which the latter asked for documents on foreign currency transfers to Israeli bank accounts.

Sharon has maintained his innocence.

One fence dispute resolved?

An Israeli team will be allowed to participate in a fencing tournament in Jordan, a fencing official said.

"We will certainly insist that the Israelis will participate in this important event," Jochen Faerber, spokesman for the International Fencing Federation, told JTA on Tuesday.

The head of the Jordanian fencing union had said that Israel's two competitors would not be allowed to attend the international tournament beginning in Aqaba this Thursday because their presence might lead to a boycott by Arab fencers.

Peace parley in Ireland postponed

A peace conference in Ireland that was to bring together high-level Israeli and Palestinian lawmakers was postponed.

The conference, set to open Monday outside Dublin, was put on hold after the Palestinian delegation refused to show up as a protest against an Israeli decision not to allow one of the Palestinians to attend. Israel's Shin Bet security service said the delegate posed a security threat. The lawmakers were slated to discuss both the Middle East and Northern Irish peace processes.

Arafat liaison dies

Yossi Ginossar, a Shin Bet veteran who served as liaison to Yasser Arafat for several Israeli prime ministers, died at 58.

Ginossar, who died of cancer on Tuesday, served since the 1980s as a key back-channel envoy to the Palestinians. But he suffered several falls from grace, forced to resign from the Shin Bet after being implicated in attempts to cover up the execution of two captive terrorists and accused in media reports last year of benefitting illicitly from business interests in the Palestinian Authority. Ginossar steadfastly denied the charges.

NORTH AMERICA

O.U. lauds Bush on vouchers

The Orthodox Union praised President Bush's pledge to seek \$50 million for school vouchers. The Orthodox Union says Bush's call, made last Friday, shows that he "understands a fundamental principle, which Judaism has taught for centuries, that children learn best when their parents guide their education."

Dialing for peace

Americans can dial a 900 number to talk to Israelis and Palestinians about life during the intifada. Hello Peace, a program of the Parents Circle, a forum for tolerance and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, will expand its service to America beginning Tuesday.

Since the service began in Israel in October 2002, more than 600,000 callers have used the hot line to talk about their pain, anger and hope.

"There can't be a successful peace agreement without integral reconciliation between the two nations, so any dialogue we can promote between Palestinians and Israelis helps," said Robi Damelin, a Parents Circle activist whose son was killed by a Palestinian sniper in March 2003. Hello Peace can be accessed by dialing 1-900-AT-PEACE.

WORLD

Turkey backs group's program

Turkey said it would support a worldwide campaign by the Simon Wiesenthal Center to classify suicide bombing as a "crime against humanity."

The assurance was given Monday by legislator Egemen Bagis at a meeting in Ankara attended by Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul and senior officials of the Wiesenthal Center. Gul and Bagis, who also serves as foreign policy adviser to Prime Minister Recip Tayyip Erdogan, said the recent bombings of synagogues and British institutions in Istanbul represented a new phase in international terrorism.

Greeks approve Holocaust Day

Greece's Parliament unanimously passed a bill declaring a memorial day for Greek Jews who died during the Nazi occupation.

The bill, proposed by Deputy Interior Minister Nikos Bistis, sets the memorial day for Jan. 27, the day Auschwitz was liberated.

The Greek Jewish community had been promoting such a bill for two decades.

Anti-Semitism rising in Holland

AMSTERDAM (JTA) — Anti-Semitic acts in Holland rose significantly in 2002, but few cases were serious, according to a new report.

Written by the University of Leiden and the Anne Frank Foundation in Amsterdam, the report, presented in Amsterdam last week, also noted a marked decrease in violence directed against Muslims and Muslim targets. Likewise, violence from the extreme right dropped, to 264 registered cases from 317.

Jews didn't fare so well, however. Anti-Semitic incidents rose to 60 in 2002, up from 41 in 2001.

About half of the cases were related to soccer games. Dutch fans — especially opponents of Amsterdam's Ajax club, which for various reasons is identified in the public mind with Jews — often shout things like, "Hamas, Hamas, hang the Jews in the gas."

According to the researchers, immigrant youths in Holland were less involved in anti-Semitic attacks than in the past.

In 2001, immigrant youth were responsible for about 20 percent of the anti-Semitic incidents, but the figure dropped to just 5 percent in 2002, with most of the attacks carried out by non-Muslim Dutch, particularly at anti-Israel protests. ■